

#856

HANDEL and HAYDN SOCIETY

BOSTON
SYMPHONY HALL

THE DREAM OF
GERONTIUS

Sunday Evening, April 23, 1933

at eight o'clock

HANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY

THOMPSON STONE, *Conductor*

(One Hundred and Eighteenth Season)

Concert Number 856

The Dream of Gerontius

By SIR EDWARD ELGAR, Bart., O.M., K.C.V.O. and Master of
the King's Musick

Text by CARDINAL NEWMAN

(Under the auspices of the LEAGUE OF CATHOLIC WOMEN)

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PAUL ALTHOUSE, *Tenor*

HARRY NEWCOMBE, *Bass*

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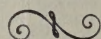
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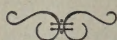
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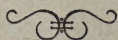
Introduction



JOHN, CARDINAL NEWMAN, was born in London, February 21, 1801, and died at Egbaston, August 11, 1890. The story of his life has been set forth in his "Apologia pro Vita Sua." He was a mystic and writer of English prose and poetry which possessed the elements of greatness. Also he was an inspirational preacher, and particularly able as a controversial speaker. "The Dream of Gerontius" was first published in a British periodical in 1865.



SIR EDWARD ELGAR was born at Broadheath, near Worcester, England, June 2, 1857. As a boy he was reared in the atmosphere of church music, his father being organist at St. George's Roman Catholic Church at Worcester. He is wholly self-taught. At one time he had charge of an orchestra made up from such inmates of a lunatic asylum as could play musical instruments. Naturally, the combinations of instruments were "unusual", to say the least. Elgar had to arrange music for this ill-balanced ensemble, with many important instruments missing. He has ascribed to this necessity for unusual scoring the facility and great skill in orchestration that he indubitably possesses.

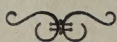


It was in 1889, when he was scarcely known outside of England, that Elgar was given a copy of "The Dream of Gerontius." It took deep hold on his imagination, and it is upon this beautiful setting for Newman's poem that his fame as a composer of choral music chiefly rests. For eight years he worked over the score, absorbing and assimilating the thoughts of the author until the poem and music were welded in one. The first performance of the work was at the Birmingham Festival, October 3, 1900.

"The Dream of Gerontius" has been likened to, and has even been said to transcend, Parsifal as a religious drama. The prelude is built up of themes which stand for the fundamental emotions of Gerontius and the agencies employed for his relief. These themes are

introduced and developed throughout the work. An English musical critic is authority for the statement that the first theme of the Prelude typifies the Judgment. Then follow themes portraying Fear, Prayer, Sleep, the Miserere, and Despair. Apparently the composer took a leaf from Wagner's "leading-motive" idea for his own uses.

"The Dream of Gerontius" is not based on historical fact, and is notable in religious literature because its hero is no saint or famous personage, but only an ordinary man, who, faced with the tremendous experience of death, is stricken with terror at his own weakness and unworthiness, and calls upon his friends to pray for him "who has not strength to pray." As they intone a litany he prays and confesses his faith, but is again tortured by fear. He calls again for intercessory prayers from Mary, Joseph, and the angel that attended in the agony of Jesus, and then, exhausted, falls asleep. There follows an account of his adventures, in dreams, with the Guardian Angel of his soul, who seems to bear him through an infinity of space toward the House of Judgment. The Angel sings of how he has watched over his soul since his birth, and is now bearing him to Heaven. "Close to the Judgment Court" they hear the howls of the Demons, who, "hungry and wild to claim their property and gather souls for Hell," mock and deride the aspiration of men toward God. The Soul of Gerontius is deaf to their cries, and asks the Angel if he will see God when he reaches the throne. He is assured that he will, but "that the flame of the Everlasting Love must burn ere it transform." Gerontius and his Guardian Angel hear choirs of angels extolling God for sending His Son to earth, deploring man's sins and weakness, and telling of the penitential fire necessary to purify man of his iniquities. As he enters the "veiled presence" of God, Gerontius hears the voices of his friends praying with the priest around his bed, and the Angel of the Agony pleading with Jesus for the souls of the dying. "Consumed and quickened" by the Divine glance, he is again borne away by his Angel and is committed to the Angels of Purgatory, that he may speedily complete its penance and enter into the joys of Heaven.



Overture to "Der Freischuetz" von Weber

The Dream of Gerontius

PART ONE

GERONTIUS

JESU, MARIA—I am near to death,
And Thou art calling me; I know it now.
Not by the token of this faltering breath,
This chill at heart, this dampness on my brow,—
(Jesu, have mercy! Mary, pray for me!)
'Tis this new feeling, never felt before,
(Be with me, Lord, in my extremity!)
That I am going, that I am no more.
'Tis this strange innermost abandonment,
(Lover of souls! great God! I look to Thee,)
This emptying out of each constituent
And natural force, by which I come to be.
Pray for me, O my friends; a visitant
Is knocking his dire summons at my door,
The like of whom, to scare me and to daunt,
Has never, never come to me before;
So pray for me, my friends, who have not strength to
pray.

ASSISTANTS

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison,
Holy Mary, pray for him.
All holy Angels, pray for him.
Choirs of the righteous, pray for him.
All Apostles, all Evangelists, pray for him.
All holy Disciples of the Lord, pray for him.
All holy Innocents, pray for him.
All holy Martyrs, all holy Confessors,
All holy Hermits, all holy Virgins,
All ye Saints of God, pray for him.

GERONTIUS

Rouse thee, my fainting soul, and play the man;
And through such waning span
Of life and thought as still has to be trod,
Prepare to meet thy God.
And while the storm of that bewilderment
Is for a season spent,
And, ere afresh the ruin on me fall,
Use well the interval.

ASSISTANTS

Be merciful, be gracious; spare him, Lord.
Be merciful, be gracious; Lord, deliver him.
From the sins that are past;
From Thy frown and Thine ire;
From the perils of dying;
From any complying
With sin, or denying
His God, or relying
On self, at the last;
From the nethermost fire;
From all that is evil;
From power of the devil;
Thy servant deliver,
For once and for ever.

By Thy Birth, and by Thy Cross,
Rescue him from endless loss;
By Thy death and burial,
Save him from a final fall;
By Thy rising from the tomb,
By Thy mounting up above,
By the Spirit's gracious love,
Save him in the day of doom.

GERONTIUS

Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
De profundis oro te,
Miserere, Juxta meus,
Parce mihi, Domine.

Firmly I believe and truly
God is Three, and God is One;
And I next acknowledge duly
Manhood taken by the Son.
And I trust and hope most fully
In that Manhood crucified;
And each thought and deed unruly
Do to death, as He has died.
Simply to His grace and wholly
Light and life and strength belong,
And I love, supremely, solely,
Him the holy, Him the strong.
Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
De profundis oro te,
Miserere, Juxta meus,
Parce mihi, Domine.
And I hold in veneration,
For the love of Him alone,
Holy Church, as His creation,
And her teachings, as His own.
And I take with joy whatever
Now besets me, pain or fear,
And with a strong will I sever
All the ties which bind me here.
Adoration aye be given,
With and through the angelic host,
To the God of earth and heaven,
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
De profundis oro te,
Miserere, Juxta meus,
Mortis in discrimine.

I can no more; for now it comes again,
That sense of ruin, which is worse than pain,
That masterful negation and collapse
Of all that makes me man.

And, crueler still,
A fierce and restless fright begins to fill
The mansion of my soul. And, worse and worse,
Some bodily form of ill
Floats on the wind, with many a loathsome curse
Tainting the hallowed air, and laughs, and flaps
Its hideous wings,
And makes me wild with horror and dismay.
O Jesu, help! pray for me, Mary, pray!
Some Angel, Jesu! such as came to Thee
In Thine own agony.
Mary, pray for me. Joseph, pray for me.
Mary, pray for me.

ASSISTANTS

Rescue him, O Lord, in this his evil hour,
As of old so many by Thy gracious power:—
Noe from the waters in a saving home;
(Amen.)
Job from all his multiform and fell distress;
(Amen.)
Moses from the land of bondage and despair;
(Amen.)
David from Golia and the wrath of Saul;
(Amen.)
So, to show Thy power,
Rescue this Thy servant in his evil hour.

GERONTIUS

Novissima hora est; and I fain would sleep,
The pain has wearied me. . . . Into Thy hands,
O Lord, into Thy hands. . . .

THE PRIEST

Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo!
Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul!
Go from this world! Go, in the Name of God
The Omnipotent Father, who created thee!
Go, in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord,
Son of the living God, who bled for thee!
Go, in the Name of the Holy Spirit, who
Hath been poured out on thee!

ASSISTANTS

Go, in the name
Of Angels and Archangels; in the name

Of Thrones and Dominations; in the name
Of Princedoms and of Powers; and in the name
Of Cherubim and Seraphim, go forth!
Go, in the name of Patriarchs and of Prophets;
And of Apostles and Evangelists,
Of Martyrs and Confessors; in the name
Of holy Monks and Hermits; in the name
Of holy Virgins; and all Saints of God,
Both men and women, go! Go on thy course;
And may thy place to-day be found in peace,
And may thy dwelling be the Holy Mount
Of Sion:—through the Same, through Christ our Lord.

PART II

SOUL OF GERONTIUS

I went to sleep; and now I am refreshed.
A strange refreshment: for I feel in me
An inexpressive lightness, and a sense
Of freedom, as I were at length myself,
And ne'er had been before. How still it is!
I hear no more the busy beat of time,
No, nor my fluttering breath, nor struggling pulse;
Nor does one moment differ from the next.

This silence pours a solitariness
Into the very essence of my soul;
And the deep rest, so soothing and so sweet,
Hath something too of sternness and of pain.

Another marvel: someone has me fast
Within his ample palm; . . . A uniform
And gentle pressure tells me I am not
Self-moving, but borne forward on my way.
And hark! I hear a singing: yet in sooth
I cannot of that music rightly say
Whether I hear, or touch, or taste the tones.
Oh, what a heart-subduing melody!

ANGEL

My work is done,
My task is o'er,
And so I come,
Taking it home,
For the crown is won,
Alleluia.
For evermore.

My Father gave
In charge to me
This child of earth
E'en from its birth,
To serve and save,
Alleluia,
And saved is he.

This child of clay
To me was given,
To rear and train
By sorrow and pain
In the narrow way,
Alleluia,
From earth to heaven.

SOUL

It is a member of that family
Of wondrous beings, who, ere the worlds were made,
Millions of ages back, have stood around
The throne of God.

I will address him. Mighty one, my Lord.
My Guardian Spirit, all hail!

ANGEL

All hail, my child!
My child and brother, hail! what wouldest thou?

SOUL

I would have nothing but to speak with thee
For speaking's sake. I wish to hold with thee
Conscious communion; though I fain would know
A maze of things, were it but meet to ask,
And not a curiousness.

ANGEL

You cannot now
Cherish a wish which ought not to be wished.

SOUL

Then I will speak. I ever had believed
That on the moment when the struggling soul
Quitted its mortal case, forthwith it fell
Under the awful Presence of its God,
There to be judged and sent to its own place.
What lets me now from going to my Lord?

ANGEL

Thou art not let; but with extremest speed
Art hurrying to the Just and Holy Judge.

SOUL

Dear Angel, say,
Why have I now no fear at meeting Him?
Along my earthly life, the thought of death
And judgment was to me most terrible.

ANGEL

It is because
Then thou didst fear, that now thou dost not fear.
Thou hast forestalled the agony, and so
For thee the bitterness of death is passed.
Also, because already in thy soul
The judgment is begun.

ANGEL

A presage falls upon thee, as a ray
Straight from the Judge, expressive of thy lot.
That calm and joy uprising in thy soul
Is first-fruit to thee of thy recompense,
And heaven begun.

SOUL

Now that the hour is come, my fear is fled;
And at this balance of my destiny,
Now close upon me, I can forward look
With a serenest joy.

But hark! upon my sense
Comes a fierce hubbub, which would make me fear
Could I be frightened.

ANGEL

We are now arrived
Close on the judgment-court; that sudden howl
Is from the demons who assemble there,
Hungry and wild, to claim their property,
And gather souls for hell. Hist to their cry.

SOUL

How sour and how uncouth a dissonance!

DEMONS

Low-born clods
Of brute earth,
They aspire
To become gods,
By a new birth,
And an extra grace,
And a score of merits,
As if aught
Could stand in place
Of the high thought,
And the glance of fire
Of the great spirits,
The powers blest,
The lords by right,
The primal owners,
Of the proud dwelling
And the realm of light,—
Dispossessed,
Aside thrust,
Chucked down,
By the sheer might
Of a despot's will,
Of a tyrant's frown,
Who after expelling
Their hosts, gave,
Triumphant still,
And still unjust,
Each forfeit crown
To psalm-droners,
And canting groaners,
To every slave,
And pious cheat,
And crawling knave,
Who licked the dust
Under his feet.

ANGEL

It is the restless panting of their being;
Like beasts of prey, who, caged within their bars,
In a deep hideous purring watch their life,
And an incessant pacing to and fro.

DEMONS

The mind bold
And independent,
The purpose free,
So we are told,
Must not think
To have the ascendant.
What's a saint?
One whose breath
Doth the air taint
Before his death:
A bundle of bones,
Which fools adore.
Hal ha!
When life is o'er.
Virtue and vice,
A knave's presence.
'Tis all the same;
Hal ha!
Dread of hell-fire,
Of the venomous flame.
A coward's plea.
Give him his price,
Saint though he be,
Hal ha!
From shrewd good sense
He'll slave for hire;

Hal ha!

And does but aspire
To the heaven above
With sordid aim,
And not from love.
Hal ha!

SOUL

I see not those false spirits; shall I see
My dearest Master, when I reach His throne?

ANGEL

Yes,—for one moment thou shalt see thy Lord.
One moment; but thou knowest not, my child,
What thou dost ask: that sight of the Most Fair
Will gladden thee, but it will pierce thee too.

SOUL

Thou speakest darkly, Angel! and an awe
Falls on me, and a fear lest I be rash.

ANGEL

There was a mortal, who is now above
In the mid glory: he, when near to die,
Was given communion with the Crucified,—
Such, that the Master's very wounds were stamped
Upon his flesh; and, from the agony
Which thrilled through body and soul in that embrace,
Learn that the flame of the Everlasting Love
Doth burn ere it transform.

CHOIR OF ANGELICALS

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise:

ANGEL

Hark to those sounds!
They come of tender beings angelical,
Least and most childlike of the sons of God.

CHOIR OF ANGELICALS

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise:
In all His words most wonderful;
Most sure in all His ways!

To us His elder race He gave
To battle and to win,
Without the chastisement of pain,
Without the soil of sin.

The younger son He willed to be
A marvel in His birth:
Spirit and flesh His parents were;
His home was heaven and earth.

The Eternal blessed His child, and armed,
And sent Him hence afar,
To serve as champion in the field
Of elemental war.

To be His Viceroy in the world
Of matter, and of sense;
Upon the frontier, towards the foe,
A resolute defence.

ANGEL

We now have passed the gate, and are within
The House of Judgment.

SOUL

The sound is like the rushing of the wind—
The summer wind—among the lofty pines.

CHOIR OF ANGELICALS

Glory to Him, who evermore
By truth and justice reigns;
Who tears the soul from out its case,
And burns away its stains!

ANGEL

They sing of thy approaching agony,
Which thou so eagerly didst question of.

SOUL

My soul is in my hand: I have no fear,—

But hark! a grand mysterious harmony:
It floods me, like the deep and solemn sound
Of many waters.

ANGEL

And now the threshold, as we traverse it,
Utters aloud its glad responsive chant.

CHOIR OF ANGELICALS

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise:
In all His words most wonderful;
Most sure in all His ways!

O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
A second Adam to the fight
And to the rescue came.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood
Which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
Should strive and should prevail;

And that a higher gift than grace
Should flesh and blood refine,
God's Presence and His very Self,
And Essence all divine.

O generous love! that He who smote
In man for man the foe,
The double agony in man
For man should undergo;

And in the garden secretly,
And on the cross on high,
Should teach His brethren and inspire
To suffer and to die.

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise:
In all His words most wonderful;
Most sure in all His ways!

ANGEL

Thy judgment now is near, for we are come
Into the veiled presence of our God.

SOUL

I hear the voices that I left on earth.

ANGEL

It is the voice of friends around thy bed,
Who say the "Subvenite" with the priest.
Hither the echoes come; before the Throne
Stands the great Angel of the Agony,
The same who strengthened Him, what time He knelt
Lone in the garden shade, bedewed with blood.
That Angel best can plead with Him for all
Tormented souls, the dying and the dead.

ANGEL OF THE AGONY

Jesul by that shuddering dread which fell on Thee;
Jesul by that cold dismay which sickened Thee;
Jesul by that pang of heart which thrilled in Thee;
Jesul by that mount of sins which crippled Thee;
Jesul by that sense of guilt which stifled Thee;
Jesul by that innocence which girdled Thee;
Jesul by that sanctity which reigned in Thee;
Jesul by that Godhead which was one with Thee;
Jesul spare these souls which are so dear to Thee;

Souls, who in prison, calm and patient, wait for
Thee;
Hasten, Lord, their hour, and bid them come to Thee.
To that glorious Home, where they shall ever gaze on
Thee.

SOUL

I go before my Judge.

VOICES ON EARTH

Be merciful, be gracious; spare him, Lord.
Be merciful, be gracious; Lord, deliver him.

ANGEL

Praise to His Name!

O happy, suffering soul! for it is safe,
Consumed, yet quickened, by the glance of God.

SOUL

Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,
Told out for me.
There, motionless and happy in my pain,
Lone, nor forlorn,—
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn.
There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,
Which ne'er can cease
To throb, and pine, and languish, till possess
Of its Sole Peace.
There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:—
Take me away,
That sooner I may rise, and go above,
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day.

SOULS OF PURGATORY

Lord, Thou hast been our refuge: in every generation;
Before the hills were born, and the world was from
age to age Thou art God.
Bring us not, Lord, very low; for Thou hast said,
Come back again, ye sons of Adam.
Come back, O Lord! how long: and be entreated for
Thy servants.

ANGEL

Softly and gently, dearly-ransomed soul,
In my most loving arms I now enfold thee,
And, o'er the penal waters, as they roll,
I poise thee, and I lower thee, and hold thee.

And carefully I dip thee in the lake,
And thou, without a sob or a resistance,
Dost through the flood thy rapid passage take,
Sinking deep, deeper, into the dim distance.

Angels, to whom the willing task is given,
Shall tend, and nurse, and lull thee, as thou liest;
And Masses on the earth, and prayers in heaven,
Shall aid thee at the Throne of the Most Highest.

Farewell, but not for ever! brother dear,
Be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow;
Swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here,
And I will come and wake thee on the morrow.

SOULS

Lord, Thou hast been our refuge, &c. Amen.

CHOIR OF ANGELICALS

Praise to the Holiest, &c. Amen.

